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Academic writing centers and the teaching of academic writing at colleges: Literature review

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Although colleges have offered academic writing courses, many students still struggle with this writing ability. Their poor writing skills are also associated with a lack of teacher guidance The tasks given by teachers are sometimes beyond their capabilities. Students are not accustomed to writing long academic papers. As a result, they do not enjoy writing essays, and they are not confident in their writing skills. This research is intended to collect and analyze articles related to Academic Writing Courses and the teaching of academic writing at colleges. The design used is a literature review, articles are collected using search engines such as JStore, Academic One file, Sciencedirect, and Proquest. The criteria for the articles used are those published in 2008-2021. Based on the articles collected the result is that academic writing centers (AWC) does not guarantee better grades for the students. Instead, it is time to help them fulfill their needs: i) Becoming self-directed; ii) Independent writers; iii) Building the confidence of writers; and iv) Helping writers with advanced writing tasks.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is one of the language skills that college students must acquire in order to succeed in the academic and even other related aspects of their lives. For students learning english, this ability allows them to know all the rules of their language and organize their ideas more consistently with the language. As they continue to practice writing, they expand their knowledge and learn foreign language commands. As the students with excellent writing skills graduate from colleges, employers are likely to look for them. They are hired or promoted based on their writing skills [1]–[3]. The companies consider writing skills essential for their workers.

Although colleges have offered academic writing courses, many students still struggle with this writing ability. Feeling overwhelmed by the demands of work is one indication that they are not always ready to complete the writing tasks that the professor needs [4]. Their poor writing skills are also associated with a lack of teacher guidance [5], [6]. For example, they do not have enough feedback to improve their work. Teachers taught them using the same teaching methods that did not work for all students [3], [7]. In addition, the tasks given by teachers are sometimes beyond their capabilities [8]. [9] mentions that students are not accustomed to writing long academic papers. As a result, they do not enjoy writing essays [10] and they are

not confident in their writing skills [3]. These conditions unavoidably affect their success in college and future careers [9].

Due to students' low academic writing skills [11] universities in the United States of America (USA) have set up writing centers. Establishing academic writing centers (AWC) at American universities has been part of their educational tradition since the early 20th century [12]. At the early stage of the establishment, the student were the organizers of AWC. At that time, AWC aimed to make this training center a place to promote reading, writing, and debate skills [12].

In practice, students, as participants, are very often expecting too much from AWC. For example, this center is often considered a "correction" place where grammar is modified and improved [11]. By contrast, AWC is not intended to improve grammar [11]. Instead, this writing center is established to provide students with the opportunity to improve their work outside of regular classes and support all types of writing tasks and all types of writers [12]. In short, AWC is established not to create perfect writers. However, it is intended to develop the participants' writing skills through writing practices.

Writing centers have drawn researchers to investigate how they impact students' writing improvement. For example, [13] found that participants' satisfaction is related to the service quality offered by the writing center and will visit the writing center in the future. The services of the writing center include a personal tutoring approach. However, other aspects such as more explanation of corrections, additional material, tutor specialization, and longer sessions need to be improved.

Olson et al. [14] mentioned that universities in Thailand had adopted a writing center. Using the model of an academic writing center with peer staff in the United States (US), the writing center programs in Thailand do not always run smoothly. For example, participants may still need a driving factor, such as additional class credit and financial supports. The participants had a strong perception that the peer tutors of Thai students were smaller than those qualified to offer writing tutoring. Financial support for the writing center is not always easy to obtain because the faculties may have different agenda, especially during the pandemic.

Savarese et al. [15] found that student's interest in attending a writing center was strongly related to their expectations of improving their grades. Most of the participants from the writing center were students who had problems with their writing test scores. In addition, other participants were curious about the writing center program because most of them were new students. Bromley et al. [16] mention that the perception of these students dramatically affects their motivation and performance in improving writing skills. The research of Missakian et al. [17] stated that many students perceive the writing center only as a place that assists in checking grammar and punctuation. However, guidance from tutors in writing makes students believe that writing is a collaborative process that needs to be respected [16], due to the direct interaction between students and tutors in writing, including the work on assignment from tutors. Cheatle and Bullerjahn [18] found that although not all instructors in the composition class encouraged students to join the writing center because of their different scientific backgrounds, it turned out that the majority of these students had taken advantage of the writing center.

Students who are less interested in writing do not want to involve in the writing process [17]. As a result, they do not fully develop writing skills. Students who focus more on final grades than on the guidance process tend not to appreciate the overall purpose of the meaning of writing tutoring itself. Some students believe that the writing tutoring center is not aimed at all students but only for international students and first-year students [18]. They viewed that writing centers were not created equally for most students' services. This opinion contrasts the primary goal of the writing tutoring center, which is a resource for all students without exception

While many authors still have not provided a comprehensive picture of the extent to which the writing center impacts the progress of students' academic writing skills. This paper attempts to fill the gap by providing a systematic review of the research results on the writing center. Several pedagogical implications are presented at the end of the paper.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses Literature review, which aims to provide information sourced from various documents, including reference books, magazines, results of previous studies with a similar point of view. The data and information collected are the basic theories related to the material being studied. The sources of reference data used in this research are journals and books. Also, this study considers data collection techniques by conducting a review of reference books and literature, including opinions or definitions from various experts, as a reference study for theoretical studies and scientific work studies. The data sources were collected based on the suitability of the paper's contents with the research topic, quality of the articles, and the year of publication (last five years). The researchers finally decided to get a paper from several reputable journals. The articles specifically describe the results of research on the

academic writing center. Due to limited access to paid journals, the researchers focused on specific open access journals published from 2021 to 2016. After carrying out library research, the researchers managed to collect 100 papers, the number of which is ten articles (0.1%) published in 2021, twenty articles (0.2%) published in 2020, fifteen articles (0.15%) published in 2019, twenty articles (0.2%) published in 2018, twenty-five articles (0.25%) published in 2017, and ten articles published (0.1%) in 2016. Having determined 30% of the article population, researchers obtained 30 papers as the research samples.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following are the characteristics of the writing center that the author got from several studies. Briefly, some researchers [10], [19]–[22] looked at writing centers' strategic role in helping students improve their writing skills. The following is an overview of the ideal characteristics of a writing center that several researchers share in their papers.

3.1. Teaching using individualized writing instructions

One of the characteristics of AWC is to provide individualized writing instruction through one-on-one assistance with their writing [22] that facilitates student learning [19]. AWCs are needed because teachers cannot provide extended, ongoing collaborative discussion, questioning, and practice opportunities. Thus, tutors should assist by working with all aspects of the writing process. This goal starts with the customization of the tutorial to the students' needs. Individualized writing instruction requires that student writing is not all the same and that all writing should not be approached in the same way [23]. In other words, no two tutorials are alike because each writer has different wants and needs. These facts bring about some implications.

First, tutors should design their instructions based on the participants' needs. This fact should be clearly understood in advance because tutors will work with various populations, disciplines, and genres. At this stage, AWC needs to carry out a need analysis whose purpose is to collect and analyze different sources of information, both subjective and objective, to understand the needs of a target group. Sources of information come from various parties related to the establishment of writing centers, for example, including: i) Undergraduate students; ii) Graduate students; iii) Professional students; iv) Faculty members; v) Researchers; vi) Tutors; vii) Staff; viii) Community members; ix) Administrators, and x) Staff members. These stakeholders have an interest in the success of AWC. The goal of need analysis is to map out critical stakeholders and determine their influence and importance to AWC, and the most effective way of communication with those stakeholders. Conduction survey and interviews with the participants, the tutors learn what their potential participants need to join AWC.

Second, the tutor avoids his instructional model, which is overly directive with the student. In contrast, the tutor tries to balance the writer's goals with the tutor's goals to encourage participants to become self-sufficient [24]. Third, the individualized writing instruction indicates that the primary instruction is not concerned with student grades [10]. AWC is helpful in providing writing skills, encouraging students to write, and modeling the writing process and the possibility to increase grades so that they can be used to measure success [10]. Tutors guide students to be more independent in doing writing assignments.

Fourth, compared to composition classes with many students, this individualized writing instruction approach allows tutors to pay more attention to student skill development. This approach lends itself well to planning, drafting, obtaining feedback, revising all writing assignments, revising and editing, and considering students' individual needs at each writing center [19], [21]. Through this approach, tutors teach students rhetorical concepts and other complicated processes during a tutoring session [20]. In short, they can use guiding sessions to have a dialogue and reflection with the writing itself [19].

From the explanation above, we can conclude that a tutor is a bridge to success for students in improving writing skills. Nevertheless, not many understand this [5]. For some people, "errors" means mistakes in grammar, punctuation, or mechanical errors. However, the "mistake" is simply a lack of focus, development, or clarity for others. Therefore, a tutor must be able to guide and evaluate the writing skills possessed by each student. Good cooperation between tutors, students, and the writing training center will help tutors develop students' writing skills and general composition pedagogy.

As part of this approach, exploring the full range of grammar-related needs students bring to the writing center is needed, in addition to the varied pedagogies to meet those needs. Grammar anxiety (e.g., proofreading) is one such need. Tutors should recognize it and respond productively. However, tutoring also requires students to dedicate energy, organization, attention, and motivation to getting help each time they want it.

3.2. Creating a safe learning atmosphere

Making participants self-sufficient is one of AWC's goals; however, this attitude is not an easy thing to achieve. In this case, tutors must feel challenged to help students with their writing skills and understand while empathizing with the participants [5]. Tutors must learn to motivate them and create a more lasting impression about how they teach the students to improve their writing skills [25]. Tutors should demonstrate a caring, safe environment without feeling afraid or anxious. Motivation and engagement of the student should be continuous during the consultation periods.

If tutors can give attention and care to the participants, they can increase participants' confidence as writers [26]. The tutor must create a positive perception from the participants that learning is a process that is not always easy. Participants should be taught to accept constructive criticism, acknowledge their writing flaws, and improve from where they began [2]. Once tutors succeed in doing these methods tremendous academic success are likely to occur.

3.3. Promoting learning autonomy

Learning autonomy is one of the critical attitudes of achieving competence, including writing skills. Doing assignments without the supervision of a tutor is not always easy to do, but it is always possible to be conditioned [27]. Integrating technology into AWC is one way to encourage independent learning. For more than two decades, the Internet has been vital in educational settings. All levels of education, from primary education to university level, have used the Internet as a pedagogical resource.

First, currently, students are dealing with technology, that they must adapt to it to continue their education. The existence of technology makes education easier to manage, including academic work. Students rely heavily on technology in teaching and learning [9], [28] such as using devices to check spelling. Second, technology also enables participants to exchange ideas without being supervised by a tutor. Using social networking such as Facebook promotes a sense of community and collaboration amongst its young users [29].

Third, tutors can provide learning resources through technical assistance so that participants can learn remotely. They learn by watching video tutorials on various issues of good academic writing and experimenting with applications relevant to writing skills. However, a tutor must also be aware that students with low computer skills will find it difficult to write using this technology, which will affect academic achievement [30]. Nevertheless, as long as students desire to learn, the internet will help students with pedagogy [31].

3.4. Supporting with relevant learning theories

Writing centers are training for participants who are psychologically and biologically mature. Adapting adult learner andragogy theory to the center of writing allows tutors to approach students in a way that suits their interests and learning needs [32]. In the perspective of andragogy, as adult learners, students are responsible for their learning, by connecting events in the classroom with their lives and professional experiences [32]–[34].

Participants should be motivated to adopt independent learning, which includes receiving feedback and using this feedback constructively to help students understand the material [35]. In addition, students must also be motivated to change the learning model from traditional to active learners to obtain maximum results. Finally, passive learners must take the initiative to find learning experiences that suit themselves [35], this is a fundamental concept regarding writing centers. To be successful, AWC must be controlled by students. On the other hand, tutor dominance reflected in directiveness often become counter-productive and likely to distract the collaboration. As a result, tutor dominance results in consultation sessions oppressive [36].

3.5. Getting supports from the faculty

The importance of faculty support in different disciplines will improve relationships between students and encourage students to have a sense of self-efficacy and self-improvement [37]. AWC will be a thriving institution because of the excellent cooperation between lecturers, tutors, students, and administration. This collaboration will be beneficial in promoting the institution [38]. Students will become active learners if they can take advantage of the services at AWC in their educational process [37].

When one instructor suggests a faculty seminar on professional development (PD) to educate the faculty on the services provided, the other instructor can attend this seminar. By attending the seminar, participants who are also instructors will understand well the services that an institution should provide to impact students' academics positively. In addition, each participant has the opportunity to get PD hours from the seminars they attend.

The issue of financing for writing centers is a sensitive matter. However, it is essential to support the continuity of writing centers such as hours of tutoring and the number of staff members. The management of

the writing training center always announces their existence and explains their need for funding and critical operations [2]. The school administration must continuously evaluate the writing institution and provide evidence that the institution has consistently helped students a lot [39]. The writing center director stated that they were under pressure to provide evidence of the existence of this institution and that funding was a positive investment for the institution. This funding request is part of educational institutions' economic problems, which often force institutions to make budgetary decisions about writing centers.

Several sources may be used as funding for a writing center, such as the institutional support to the writing center from a central budget. Through support from the faculty, the writing center will get a stable budget that does not change widely year-to-year. However, the pandemic has made it difficult for the faculty to provide this support. Most institutions provide financial support to educational programs during the pandemic. If it is difficult for the faculty to provide funding support, the writing center can do other alternatives such as student fees. However, this funding is tied to students, which changes year to year. Another alternative is to obtain or endow from an outside source, such as a foundation, organization, family, or internal grant. However, these sources are highly susceptible to change. For example, the external source can change or be deleted.

Meanwhile, internal grants often support pilot programs but only provide funding for a limited time. Even this type of funding support is short-term funding and lacks stability. Another alternative is pay-for-service, where participants pay for writing center services as-needed. The weakness of this funding model is that many writers either will not or cannot pay a fee for the service.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveald that AWC does not guarantee better grades for the students. Instead, it is aimed to help them fulfill their needs: i) Becoming self-directed; ii) Independent writers; iii) Building the confidence of writers; and iv) Helping writers with advanced writing tasks. Students who understand that one-to-one consultation will increase self-confidence and academic achievement will immediately come and actively contact AWC. In addition, they believe that students, lecturers, and writing center consultants will try to improve their writing skills. Students' impressions can determine the effectiveness of a writing center institution. Therefore, when a researcher explores the effectiveness of an institution and students' perception of the writing center services, the researcher should focus more on the students' thoughts about the writing center and their satisfaction with their consultation rather than the academic results.

Guided by experts, AWC becomes a partner for the faculty in making students more competent in writing. Besides students, lecturers who wish to publish their papers can participate in AWC. However, running the AW is also not easy if there is no support from the faculty. In addition to providing internal resource facilities and infrastructure, faculties need to provide financial support that is not small on an ongoing basis. This requires commitment.

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